Meeting a Lion, Mark Hanna and Others

By EDWARD W. TOWNSEND.

IN many New York downtown residence streets strangers wandering from the main highways, sightseeing, have been puzzled by finding here and there little two-story brick cottages wedged in between towering apartment houses. They have noted that these were either artists' studios or artistically furnished homes, and wondered at their diminutive size, or rejoiced that some Manhattanites had what back in Main Street would be important—one family homes. These were once combined stables, carriage houses and living rooms of coachmen. One such, not yet, at the time of which I write, converted into

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human habitation, stood on the north side of East Seventeenth street near Irving place, and had been rented by a showman who housed there a performing lion and its keeper. One morning the sedate neighborhood was alarmed by the report that the lion had escaped from its cage and had killed, and was devouring, a trick horse also stabled there by the showman.

Richard Harding Davis, novelist, breakfasting in a club near by, heard the alarming reports and, an old SUN man, telephoned a tip to THE SUN and also to the *World*. It was an early hour for morning newspaper workers, but David Graham Phillips and I, having then given up night work, were in our offices and were assigned, he for the *World*, to the story. The scene when we arrived was much as if a fire alarm was the cause; police lines were drawn, and a ladder led to the second story of the little brick stable; excited crowds pressed the police lines, and distracted mothers were searching for their children, out for a morning airing with nurses. Phillips and I agreed that a peek inside the building was in order, and we gingerly climbed the ladder, reached the second story floor, and in the semi-darkness found the stairs leading to the stable floor. We heard fearsome growls, sure enough, but they might come from a caged beast angered by a devoted press agent.

Lion-hunting in a dark stable was never a popular sport of mine, and Phillips admitted that he had never felt any enthusiasm for it, but Duty, the poet reminds us, is "Stern daughter of the Voice of God," no less than of city editors. We stealthily crept down a few steps of that stairway and presently, when our eyes became accustomed to the dim light, we saw exactly what we did not want to see, a big lion breakfasting on a freshly killed horse. In our agitation we made a racket which caused the lion to raise his head and, seeing us, voice a heartstopping roar, and make a movement as if to investigate the intruders upon the privacy of his feast.

Policemen, and our fellow reporters, bore glad testimony that no two firemen, escaping from a falling wall, ever slid down a ladder with such reckless speed as we developed in our retreat to the sidewalk.

There was but one thing for us to do; to learn if there had been a press agent plant. We found the showman and took him to a private room in a neighborhood cafe where we cross examined him for an hour The details are of no interest now; our conclusion was that it was a straight story. The end was that, with irons heated white hot in the boiler room of a candy factory across the way, the lion was forced back into his cage and taken away from there, much to relief of the neighborhood, especially the bothered precinct police captain. We both wrote straight stories; no other paper, as I recall, printed more than a brief joking paragraph. As I have intimated, all the wit of our professional brothers was directed at us: We, said they, were not innocents who had been imposed upon; we were knowing fakers, that was what we were! It was trying.

The Lexow Inquiry.

There is no purpose here to catalogue my more important assignments, as varied as the activities of the great city, the unexpected, the comedy, drama, tragedy, human failures and wreckage, splendid purposes and achievements; progress in art, music, theater; surprises in monumental buildings, bridges, shipping, local transit. With some phase of all these things the reporter is concerned: They are the raw material of his industry.

So, something of only a few assignments I shall set down.

State Senator Clarence Lexow was chairman of a legislative vice investigation committee created, it may be, by partisan intention, yet its depths sounding search of the underworld of New York resulted in valuable reforms. Many feared, some hoped, few expected that the investigation would, to use a sporting term, "break" as it did. Under the direction of informed and diligent counsel the committee tore down a withholding wall of secrecy, releasing a flood of vice revelations which shocked the city and State. A reporter in long service on THE SUN was assigned to the first day's session. Even that opening day gave hint that a big story would break, so I was assigned to cover future afternoon sessions. Learning of this the reporter first assigned delivered an ultimatum: He alone would have the story or he would resign. He was allowed to resign. For some reason, however, no assistant was assigned to me, but from the second to the last day—the investigation lasted months—I wrote every word of the story, although other papers had two or three writers covering it, my daily space running into several columns, the final day nine columns.

This last day's work started a shop discussion as to the record for length of a single day's story written by one reporter unassisted. I do not hold that record, though it may have been mine. Later in June, 1899, a prize fight of much interest took place at Coney Island between the heavyweights, Fitzsimmons and the Californian, Jeffries. That was reported by Joe Vila, then of THE SUN, now sporting editor and a writer of a daily signed column on THE SUN. On that story Vila began filing his telegraphed stuff at 6 in the evening; preliminaries about the principals in their headquarters, followed in order by word pictures of the arriving crowds, ringside stuff, betting, the small fry fights, the main event, round by round, interviews with the heavyweights after Fitzsimmons was knocked out in the eleventh round, then a lead for the whole story. When he had filed his last page, soon after midnight, the Western Union, checked a count of 17,000 words on his matter filed and sent.

Vila's story, and mine of the last day of the Lexow investigation, were of the same length; but Vila's work was done under conditions which made his the more notable piece of reporting. He dictated directly to a typist, not writing a line himself, composing his story as the story unfolded. I also dictated to a typist, but from notes, and under no stress of unusual exitement, and I had opportunity between adjournment of the committee and dictation for a breathing spell, to get the story somewhat outlined. Vila's story, conditions of work, character and amount produced considered, is the best piece of reporting I know of.

More Than Enough.

I often worked with Vila, a Harvard man who played both football and baseball there for two years. We were sent together to Boston, New Haven, Springfield (neutral ground), Princeton and Philadelphia on football stories. A Yale-Harvard game at New Haven was played in a cold drizzle of rain, and after the game, in lack of any means of rapid transit, we walked to the telegraph office, stopping on our wet and weary way for coffee.

At the telegraph office we found several typical queries from Night City Editor Clarke: Were we aware that our story was for publication in the morning, not the evening SUN? Could we conveniently postpone dining until after filing our stuff? And so forth. After we had each got an operator whose wire was connected with THE SUN office, and had straightened out our soggy notes, Vila turned to me and said, "We've been soaked; now let's soak it to Boss Clarke." Without so much as stopping to light a pipe we "soaked it." At 9 o'clock Clarke wired: "One or two other unimportant stories are scheduled for to-morrow's paper. Cut yours short." We grinned in triumph, and went to dinner.

Other assignments proved the special merits of my colleagues. Although he was the turf specialist Christopher Fitzgerald was for some reason satisfactory to the man who wrote the assignment sheet sent to Jacksonville, Florida, to report the fight between Jim Corbett and the Englishman, Charley Mitchell, and so was I. A day or two before the fight we were strolling about the streets in Jacksonville when Fitzgerald stopped, looked into the dim recess of a stable on the opposite side of the street, and after an appraising glance said, "There's a horse in there I want to look at." He looked over the horse and engaged it and a light rig to take him to and from the scene of the fight, some miles out of town. When the brief ring affair was over—Corbett scored a knockout in the third round—I ran to a railway siding where a locomotive and a day coach waited to carry me to Savannah, Georgia, where I was to file my story because of inadequate telegraph facilities in Jacksonville. Fitzgerald, in no great hurry, got into his rig and started in pursuit of several competitors, and the horse whose speed he had correctly appraised at a glance gained upon and passed one competitor after another and finally took his confident driver to the telegraph office first of the army of reporters.

Mark Hanna's "Rage."

Edward Riggs, THE SUN's chief political reporter, knew every city, State and national politician of importance, and his friendly relations with them was on a strictly nonpartisan basis. I was among a number of reporters he took with him to the St. Louis Republican Convention of 1896. There he said to me: "Now, you just write about anything you see of interest; anything, my boy—except politics and the convention." I feel sure that there were tears in my eyes when I thanked him for leaving the field so wide open for me; for letting me review Hamlet, as one might say, with no mention of the Prince of Denmark. But he knew conventions better than I; there was more than enough for me to write about. Some eccentric who assigned seats for the press had placed the whole SUN outfit among the chairs generally reserved for representatives of weekly or monthly agricultural publications. When Riggs learned this he nearly passed away. He sought that eccentric, but did not speak until he had planted his ample but firm belt line against the other's waistcoat. Then he roared: "Sir, what in hell do you mean by seating THE SUN men a mile from the secretary's desk? I want my men seated where they will have quick access to all documents, have desks to write on, where they can see and hear what's going on, where copy runners can reach them in a hurry—where they belong, damn you, sir! And I want quick action without any argument."

He got what he wanted, but it was days before his outraged dignity ceased to arouse periodic appeals to heaven to tell him what that eccentric thought half a dozen SUN men had traveled a thousand miles from Broadway to do.

Returning from St. Louis, Mark Hanna's private car was attached to our train, and as I had known Mr. Hanna all my life I called upon him. He made quite a fuss over me for the reason that my brother, Horace, eldest in a family of eleven children of whom I was the youngest, had been his business associate, and their families were intimate. When he had introduced me to his traveling companions, all nationally prominent Republicans, Mr. Hanna casually remarked, as if he were asking if I still said my prayers: "And, of

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